

Relationship efficacy beliefs and communication patterns during conflict resolution in dating relationships – an APIM approach

Aleksandra Huić, Tina Krznarić, Željka Kamenov

Department of Psychology, FFZG, University of Zagreb

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Introduction



- **self-efficacy** = the expectation that one can successfully execute a behavior (*Bandura, 1977*)
- individuals higher on self-efficacy expend more effort enacting behaviors and display greater persistence when facing obstacles and difficulties (*Bandura, 1977*)
- **relationship efficacy beliefs (REB)**:
 - beliefs that we can carry out the behaviors needed to resolve relationship conflict (*Doherty, 1981*)



Introduction



- greater self-efficacy in romantic relationships should be associated with greater relationship benefits
- relationship efficacy beliefs tied to:
 - more positive attributions about partner behaviors (*Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000*)
 - less relationship conflict (*Cui, Fincham & Pasley, 2008*)
 - individuals' willingness to engage in conflict resolution and more persistence during conflict resolution (*Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Fincham, Bradbury, & Grych, 1990*)
 - one's ability to engage in specific, positive relationship promoting behaviors (*Lopez, Morúa, & Rice, 2007; Weiser & Wiegel, 2016*)
 - higher levels of relationship satisfaction (*Eğeci & Gençöz, 2006; Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000; Riggio et al., 2013*)

Introduction



- available research mostly individual and in the context of marriage
- although each partner has her/his own sense of relational competence, individual self-efficacy beliefs combine with those of the partner to shape relationship behavior (*Riggio et al., 2011*)
- emerging adulthood dating relationships
 - no full responsibility for self or others
 - evaluate romantic relationships
 - goal pursuit towards the “right” partner and relationships
 - little experience in forming and maintaining a successful long-term relationship (*Arnett, 2000; Fincham & Cui, 2010*)



Aim



- examine the role of both partners' REB for the couple's communication patterns during conflict in dating relationships

Hypotheses:

- people who believe they can successfully resolve conflicts with their partner (higher REB), will likely engage in:
 - more constructive communication during conflict
 - less negative communication during conflict
- those with partners who also have higher REB should also engage in:
 - more constructive and less negative conflict communication

Method



- on-line study
- couples recruited and briefed about the study face to face
 - inclusion criteria
 - personal codes to guarantee their anonymity
 - directed to fill out the web questionnaire alone
 - purpose of the study and their rights as participants

Sample



- 148 couples
- 18-31 y; $M=22$; $SD=2.81$
- in serious, dating relationships; heterosexual
- relationship duration 1 month – 8.5 years; $M=21.58$ months; $SD=2.857$
- 12.2% living with their partner
- various urban/rural background

Instruments



- **Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ)**, Christensen & Sullaway (1984)
- Perception of how both partners typically deal with problems in their relationships – before, during and after conflict
- 35 items; 4 dimensions; 1 – 9 (*how likely is a specific behavior*)

		α
Constructive communication	Both members express their feelings to each other.	.77
Man demand /woman withdraw	Man nags and demands, while the Woman withdraws, becomes silent, or refuses to discuss the matter further.	.72
Woman demand /man withdraw	Woman criticizes while Man defends himself.	.76
Mutual Avoidance and Withholding	Both members avoid discussing the problem.	.56

Instruments



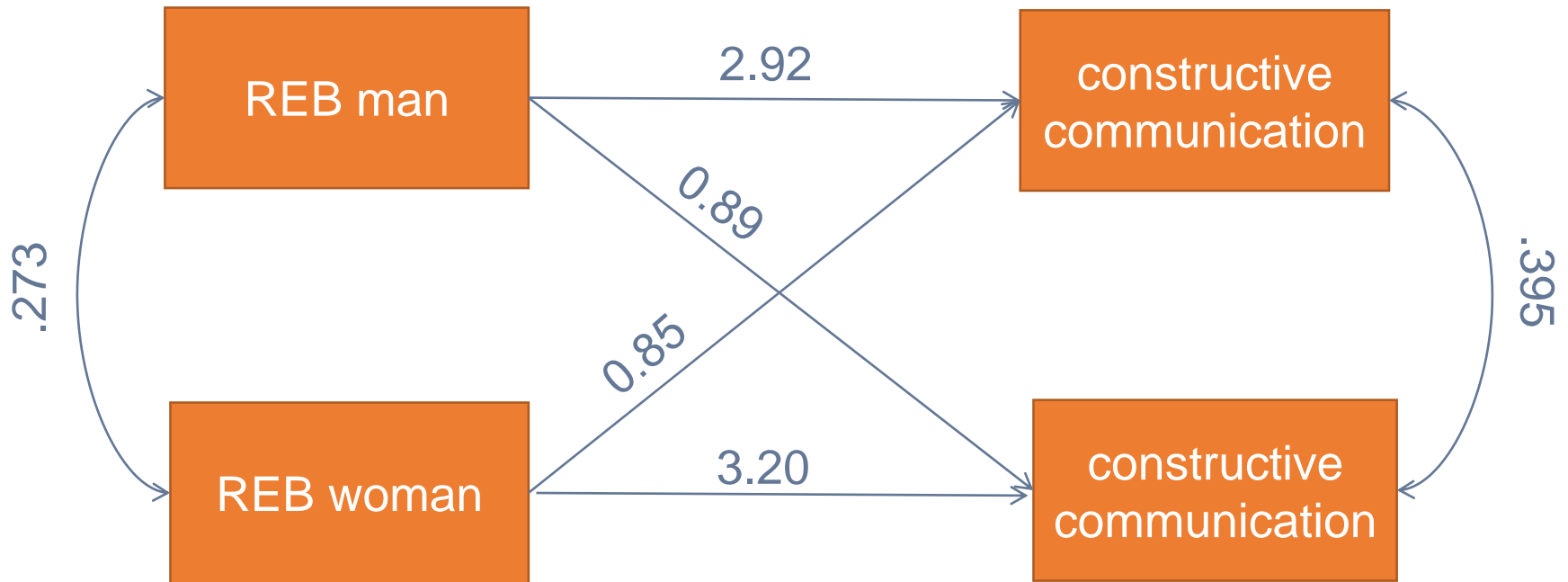
- **Relationship Efficacy Measure (REM)**, Fincham, Harold & Gano-Phillips (2000)
 - 7 items, 1-7 (agreement)
 - „There is no way I can solve some of the problems in my relationship”.
 - „I am able to do the things needed to settle our conflicts”
 - $\alpha = .87$
 - higher results indicate higher efficacy beliefs
- **Relationship Satisfaction Scale**, Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998
 - 5 items, 1-7 (agreement)
 - $\alpha = .88$

Results

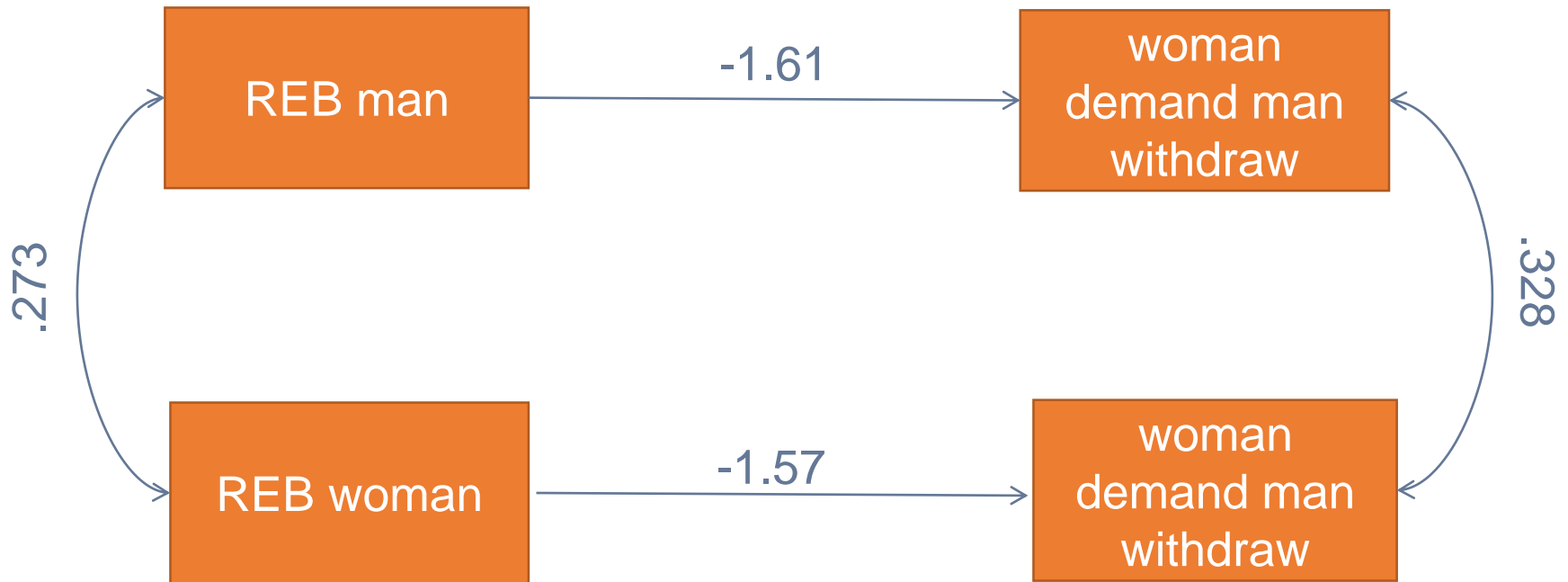


- A & P REB → more relationship satisfaction
- A & P constructive communication → more satisfaction
- A & P destructive communication strategies → less satisfaction

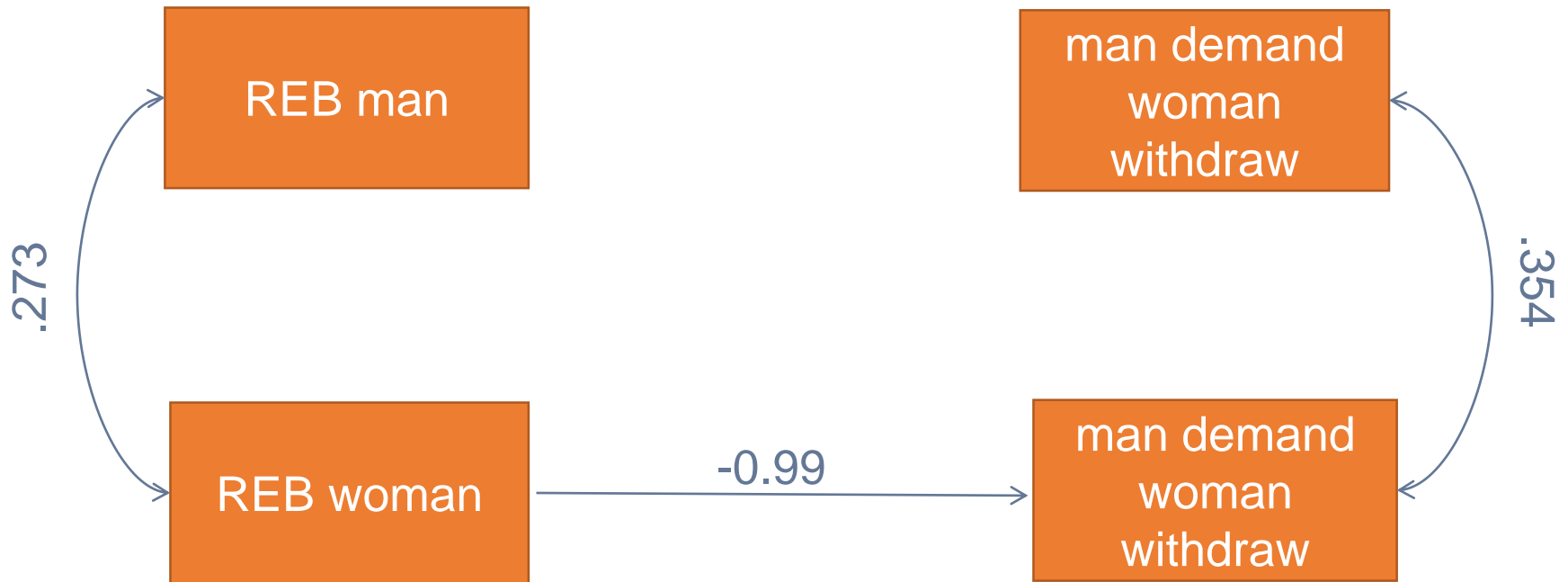
REB and conflict communication



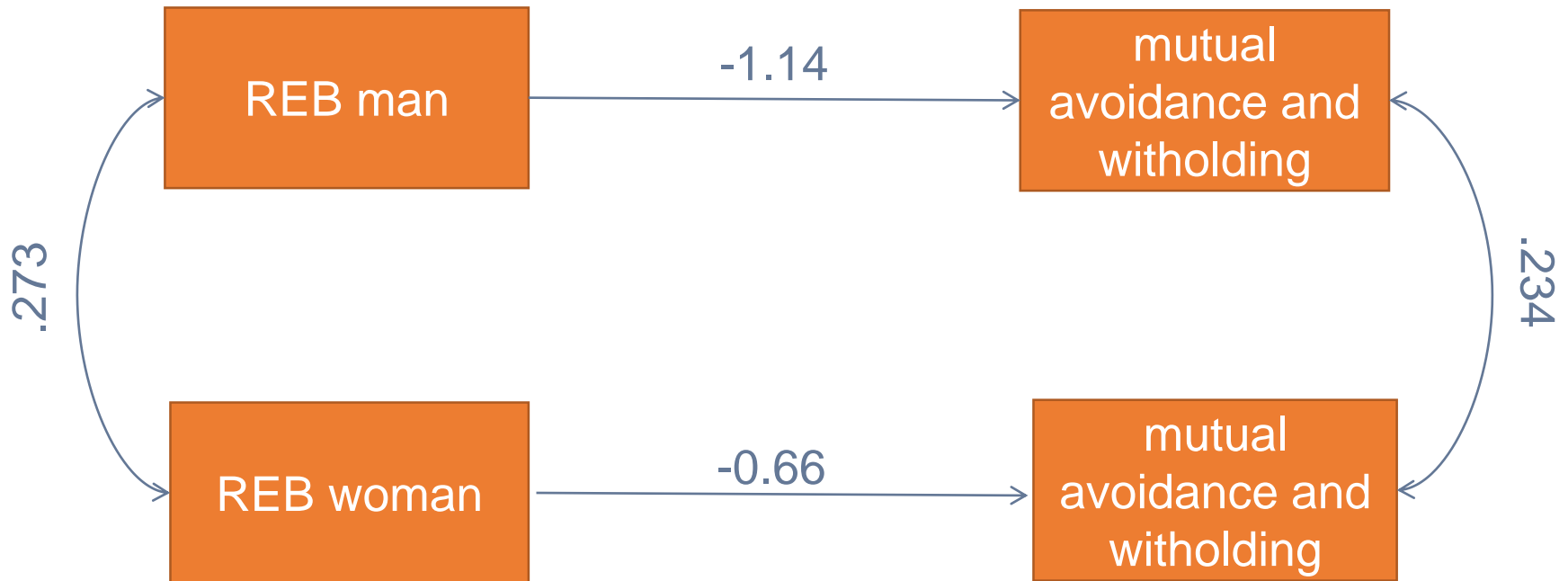
REB and conflict communication



REB and conflict communication



REB and conflict communication



Discussion



- significant actor effects – individuals with higher relationship efficacy beliefs report more constructive communication and less negative communication during conflicts
- furthermore, those whose partners have higher relationship efficacy beliefs report on more constructive communication during conflicts in their relationships
- however, no partner effects for negative communication strategies
 - perception of demand/withdraw and mutual avoidance in couples probably shaped by other factors:
 - attributions of partner behaviors
 - partner's attachment, love, relationship goals

Discussion



- temporal ordering?
 - evidence that constructive communication precedes REB; no evidence to the reverse (*Johnson & Anderson, 2015*)
- future studies
 - longitudinal designs of dating relationships in emerging adulthood
 - new measure of conflict resolution strategies
 - relationship efficacy beliefs specific to other domains – relationship maintenance? showing affection?
- practical implications



Thank you for your attention!



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